

1 COMMISSIONER WILHELM: Janice Miller?

2 (No response.)

3 COMMISSIONER WILHELM: Penny Presley:

4 (No response.)

5 COMMISSIONER WILHELM: Don Pierson? Mr. Pierson. If
6 we couldn't have your mayor, we're glad you're here, sir.

7 MR. PIERSON: Indeed the weather and circumstances
8 have impacted all of us, but thank you for this opportunity.

9 I have prepared a document which will be provided in
10 20 copies. It's a little slow getting here due to the problems
11 that we've encountered.

12 COMMISSIONER WILHELM: We appreciate that very much.

13 MR. PIERSON: This should be a very helpful resource
14 in terms of providing all the commissioners that were unable to
15 attend this afternoon.

16 COMMISSIONER WILHELM: And again, I assure you it
17 will be shared with them.

18 MR. PIERSON: Thank you, sir.

19 My name is Donald Pierson and I'm the executive
20 director of the Greater Bossier Economic Development Foundation
21 which is, for our parish, what you might call a county area's
22 responsibility is economic development. And I would like to
23 direct the comments today to provide sort of an overview -- and
24 that's what this document does -- of our experience which we
25 consider to be an economic development success story. And that's
26 why our community embraced gaming as a way to bring about jobs
27 and prosperity to people with little opportunity.

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1 This includes information on riverboat casino
2 investment and development, it also has a discussion of social
3 concerns. There are letters of support included from elected
4 officials, two senators, our representative, and others. These
5 provide an understanding of the very positive relationship that
6 the riverboat casino industry has with the citizens of the
7 Shreveport-Bossier area.

8 Regional market studies are also provided so that you can see
9 further insight into this and other riverboat casino markets,
10 such as Biloxi where you have recently visited.

11 I would want the Commission to understand that the
12 northwest Louisiana region has unique market and a unique story
13 to tell. Our area has a very successful gaming market; it
14 continues to grow at the time of this writing. It's hard to
15 study something when the work has not even been completed.

16 As for jobs and opportunity, this industry has
17 contributed significantly to the economic success in our
18 community. Riverboat casino gaming has a significant impact on
19 the economy of the entire state of Louisiana, providing more than
20 22,000 jobs and generating more than \$300 million in tax revenues
21 for state and local governments.

22 Jobs at casinos pay an average of \$22,500 per year.
23 Minorities and women hold most of these jobs: more than 50
24 percent minority employment, more than 54 percent of women in the
25 workforce. Clearly, women and minorities are benefitting
26 substantially from their direct relationship with the riverboat
27 casino industry.

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1 Our region, with a port, a biomedical research
2 foundation, and an air force base has over 8,000 casino jobs.
3 These 8,000 jobs support an additional 4,000 jobs in the area.
4 All our eggs are not in one basket but certainly a diverse
5 economy is one that can survive long term. Again, these jobs are
6 providing great benefit to minorities and women in the workforce.

7 Communities must be concerned with the dire
8 consequences of pathological gambling which is known to affect a
9 very small segment of the population. This addiction is not
10 confined to any one class, race or ethnic group. Louisiana and
11 other states must be prepared to treat more cases. This will be
12 necessary as gambling is introduced to a larger segment of the
13 population. The focus then should be on identifying problem
14 gamblers and making effective treatment available.

15 The experience of northwest Louisiana regarding crime
16 and criminal justice is very favorable. Bossier reports a 41
17 percent decrease in reported crimes. There appears, in all our
18 studies -- and they are included -- to be no direct correlation
19 between crime rates and riverboat casino gaming. Crime has
20 declined in both Louisiana and the United States in recent years.

21 The riverboat casino industry will be a long-term
22 participant in the northwest Louisiana economy. This
23 entertainment industry, with new jobs, community development and
24 increased tax revenues, has great potential. Public officials
25 need to make responsible and informed policy decisions to manage
26 the interests of business and the goals of neighborhoods and
27 communities.

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1 We thank you for your consideration of these issues
2 as you take a look at all the communities across America. Thank
3 you very much.

4 COMMISSIONER WILHELM: Thank you very much, Mr.
5 Pierson, and thank you for your submission and for being here.

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